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VOLUNTARY SCHOOLS FOR ONTARIO.

III. What the Duke of Argyle Says.

The Duke of Argyle in a letter to the *Times* Dec. 10th, 1895, says :—The discussions which are being conducted or reported in your columns on "voluntary schools" prove very clearly that there are a good many real difficulties in the way of any perfectly satisfactory solution of the religious problem in national education. These practical difficulties concern chiefly such questions as the geographical distribution, the management, and the finance of schools. I do not now address you for the purpose of adding to the number of suggestions which have been made on these matters. I have considerable confidence in the variety of elements which are represented in the present Government, and in the probability of their taking a reasonable and conciliatory course toward all the great interests which are involved. But I am anxious to say a few words concerning a doctrine—a preconception—or a prejudice on one point, which exaggerates and embitters every difficulty, and which, I venture to think, is quite erroneous. I refer to the notion that when "the State" assigns money, whether from rates or taxes, to VOLUNTARY SCHOOLS, it is doing the same thing as endowing churches. The two things are not only different, but they are opposites. The principle which condemns the one is the very principle which justifies, and may even necessitate, the other. The principle is that the state, as we now understand the word, is so thoroughly secular that it cannot and ought not to meddle at all with religion or the Churches. I understand that principle and, with large explanations, I respect it. In its bearing on education it demands that the State should pay its money for secular education alone, and pay it, moreover, to every body or organization which will undertake to produce secularly well-educated children. The principle asserts that the State

has no business whatever to ask what religion is given by any such body or organization in addition to, or along with the secular instruction which alone is its concern. If it refuses to pay for that instruction, by whomsoever it may be provided, because the body so providing it does also teach religion, then the State is *violating its neutrality and persecuting the Churches*. Dr. Joseph Parker assumes that strict logic is on his side, and that if it be only uncompromisingly asserted men will come round to his conclusion. I hold that strict logic is against him, and I trust that a general revolt against his conclusion will lead to a wider and wider detection of the fallacies on which it rests. The dogma with which that conclusion is inseparably connected is—not the neutrality or indifference of the State towards all voluntary societies, but an inherent hostility on the part of the State to all such bodies if they have a religious character. Religion is to be regarded as something so unclean that the State will not even touch it with a barge-pole. Churches may produce scholars educated up to any standard of secular knowledge required by a State department, but they are not to get the money thus fairly earned, because they add to the secular information some elements of knowledge in Divine things. *This is not neutrality. It is hostility, and even enmity.* Such a policy is a complete abandonment, and indeed a complete defiance, of the principle on which it pretends to be founded. But having repudiated Dr. Parker's conclusion let me explain my own. Accepting the doctrine of the State being neutral in theology, but insisting that to be so, it must not be hostile to or even jealous of, the Churches, its attitude towards them on the matter of education ought logically to be expressed in some such language as this: "We, the State, are so divided in religious belief that we are compelled to be neutral between you, the Churches. We therefore, cannot help ourselves; we cannot give any definite or effective teaching of religion. But you can. And you can do what we cannot; you can combine the two, the secular and the religious element. We have no right and we have no wish to prevent you. We will, therefore,

pay you for the only results of which we are competent to take any cognisance, and we will pay you at such rates as may be fairly proportionate to the cost.

Of course, I am not to be held as admitting except for the sake of argument, that, secular as our society undoubtedly is in many respects, it is really quite so pagan as this language represents it to be. But what must be insisted upon is that the most complete and absolute secularization of the State would not only leave it free to deal with education on the footing I have defined, but would absolutely demand of it a line of conduct in harmony with that definition. I hold that the attitude of the State ought to be one of at least benevolent neutrality towards agencies which do a work which it confesses itself unable to accomplish. It ought to do everything it can to encourage those agencies to help it in secular education, and it should rejoice in that education being associated with a still higher education from which it is compelled to withdraw its hand.

I do not forget that this solution is not complete. It would be complete if any, or all, of the Churches comprehend the whole people. But unfortunately they do not. Thousands, perhaps some millions, belong to no Church. For them I fear we must be satisfied with such compromises as that which now prevails in Board schools, where what has been called a "residuum" of Christianity is taught. I am not prepared to condemn this *via media* altogether. I do not deny that there is so wide an agreement among the Churches on certain fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith that, with good will on the part of teachers, most valuable results may be attained. But I fear the drift is, and must be, towards purely secular education. Nor do I believe in the solution which points to religious instruction separate both in time and place, and conducted by the Churches. Here and there it may answer for a time. But the drift will have its way. Parents are often careless and indifferent. A trade union of masters is claiming the right to believe or disbelieve exactly as they please and may easily become what they evidently hope to

be—masters not only of the children but of the parents and of the public. All these influences, together with the usurpation of time by the high demands of modern ideas on secular instruction, will tend more and more to leave religion—nowhere.

Financially it seems to me to be the height of folly to discourage the greatest of all agencies—zeal for religious truth—in persuading men to support effici nt voluntary schools in which they take an earnest interest. I should be prepared to deal equally with all voluntary societies and all Churches in paying them for their work as tested by such methods as may be deemed best. I heartily sympathize with Roman Catholics in demanding the same reward for the same work whi :h is freely given to secular or it may be to irreligious schools. I have long thought that the restrictions placed on their education in Ireland have been the only remaining grievance in that country; and I am rather ashamed of the Protestantism which fears the effects of the emblems of our Lord's Passion exhibited on the walls of schools. Nor am I afraid in England of the silly fanaticism brought to light by Dr. Rigg in a catechism composed by a gentleman of the name of Gace. If Dr. Rigg thinks that this sort of thing can spread widely in the face of an open Bible, and in times when the laity are likely to take an increasing part in the government of their Church I hope and believe he is too nervous. But in any case the field of contest with such opinions lies outside the walls of Parliament or of any Government department. *Voluntary schools are the best, and, indeed, the only hope of combining good secular education with religious knowledge*; and I agree with Dr. Parker in wishing to have "careful instruction by qualified teachers in distinctive Christian doctrine and morality." But as we—the State—cannot pick and choose what is "distinctive" and also true, we must be content to leave that to the various branches of the Christian Church and to deal with them all equally as our best and, indeed, our only agents in that great work.

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